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SUBJECT: GOI WANTS TO HELP US IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Summary: MEA Joint Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran) Dilip Sinha told us on July 14 that India is very committed to its Afghan reconstruction projects, is looking for opportunities to do more in reconstruction, vocational training, and election and governance technical assistance, and would welcome proposals for joint projects with the US. The degradation in the security situation is a threat to the September Parliamentary elections, he warned, blaming Pakistan for the resurgent Taliban violence. The new Iranian president-elect is an unknown to the GOI, and India will have to wait to see what policies he adopts. Building on the US-India Democracy Initiative at next week's Manmohan Singh visit to Washington, we should take maximum advantage of India's desire to help in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Progress on Pul-i-Khumri Power Line Construction

2. (U) The Indian PowerGrid contractor team has just returned from a trip to Kabul to deal with technical queries for the Kabul to Pul-i-Khumri transmission line, Sinha reported, pronouncing them "completely satisfied" with the progress made during their visit. PowerGrid is now setting up its Kabul office, and has detailed two people familiar with the exact route of the transmission line to work with the demining team, starting by the end of July.

Further Assistance Projects: Parliament, Job Training

3. (SBU) India has dispatched an architect to Kabul to review with Afghan leaders proposals for the construction of a new Parliament building, Sinha said, affirming that India would fund and execute the project itself. Additionally, a team of Afghan workers for the new Parliament Secretariat will visit New Delhi in India to learn about GOI training courses for new parliamentarians that could be adapted for the Afghans elected on September 18.

4. (SBU) New Delhi is "very keen" to push ahead with more reconstruction and assistance projects, Sinha said. Referring to his June 20 discussion of potential areas of US-India collaboration with S/P Krasner, Sinha outlined a plan for Indian "train-the-trainer" type assistance to teach simple vocational skills. The GOI is concerned that its reconstruction projects (such as the hospital, cold storage facility, and schools that it has constructed) may fall into disrepair after a few years as the needed skills for maintenance and repair are lacking. MEA is requesting that the contractors who have constructed these projects remain on-site for two to three years, during which time they would pass on maintenance skills to local employees.

5. (SBU) Expanding on this idea, Sinha relayed a proposal from Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood in Kabul to send Indian polytechnic school instructors to Afghanistan to train Afghans in carpentry, electrical, masonry and other trades, and teach them to train others. The US could help by funding the next phase for the newly-taught trainees to pass on their knowledge to others or by funding tool kits for the graduates of India's courses. He proposed that regional training camps could be set up with donor-country sponsorship for each camp, including providing the tools and materials needed to train and equip students. The GOI would like to formalize the vocational training proposal with the GOA before PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Kabul in September.

Ready to Assist with Elections

6. (SBU) The GOI is willing to assist in the September Parliamentary elections in any way that the GOA needs, Sinha said. Two Indian Election Commission experts are going to work with the UN mission to assist the polls, but the GOA has not yet made any specific requests for help.

Violence Controlled by Pakistan

7. (C) Sinha worried that the elections were at risk from resurgent Taliban violence originating in Pakistan. The GOI has "clear evidence" that Pakistan is behind the increased

violence, he said. Pakistan has the ability to control this if it chooses, Sinha stated, citing the calm environment in which the Presidential elections took place. It is difficult to say why Pakistan has decided to unleash more violence at this time instead, he commented, warning that long-term security in Afghanistan is not assured, given Pakistan's ability to destabilize Afghanistan.

Iran's New President: Wait and See

18. (C) Sinha said that the GOI has had no contact yet with the Iranian president-elect Ahmadinejad, knew nothing of him before his election, and was waiting to see what policies he might take upon assuming office. India maintains an annual "strategic dialogue" with Iran, and the next meeting will be in May 2006. In any case, New Delhi believes a policy of constructive engagement with Iran would be most productive, he commented, reiterating that the GOI's position is that Iran should live up to NPT commitments and work with the IAEA to resolve nuclear program disputes. PolCouns reviewed our concerns about terrorism and WMD in familiar terms, expressing our hope that India will use its presence in Tehran to urge the government in a constructive direction. Sinha took this point, but added that India has been living with the bomb in its neighborhood since 1964, and an Iranian nuclear weapon would be a more distant concern than the closer bombs already in existence.

Comment: Ramp Up the Afghanistan Cooperation

19. (C) The positive feedback on PowerGrid's consultations for the Pul-i-Khumri project is welcome given initial MEA resistance to coordination meetings, and seems to signal a change of heart toward the idea of joint programs. The MEA is receptive to proposals for more collaborative efforts in Afghanistan, which will be an obvious area for cooperation on the US-India Democracy Initiative (including the parliamentary training). We should work out details for joint efforts in both democracy promotion and reconstruction while both the MEA's regional bureau and its Ambassador in Kabul are receptive.

BLAKE